

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

NO. 1317

A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”
Romans 12:21.

THIS is a very meaty verse, and the form of it greatly assists the memory; it is worthy to be called a Christian proverb. I would recommend every Christian to learn it by heart, and have it ready for use, for there are a great many proverbs which convey a very different sense, and these are often quoted to give the weight of authority to unchristian principles. Here is an inspired proverb—carry it with you and use it as a weapon with which to parry the thrusts of the world's wisdom. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Observe that the text appears to give us a choice between two things, and bids us choose the better one; you must either be overcome of evil, or you must overcome evil—one of the two. You cannot let evil alone, and evil will not let you alone; you must fight, and in the battle you must either conquer or be conquered! The words before us remind me of the saying of the Scot officer of the Highland regiment when he brought them up in front of the enemy, and said, “Lads, there they are: if you dinna kill them, they'll kill you.” So does Paul marshal us in front of evil, and like a wise general, he puts us on our mettle by saying, “Overcome, or be overcome.” There is no avoiding the conflict, no making truce or holding parley, no suspension of hostilities after a brief skirmish; the battle must be fought through to the end, and can only close with a decided victory to one or the other side. Soldier of Christ, do you need to debate which of the two to choose, victory or defeat?

To be utterly overcome of evil would be a very dreadful thing! I shall say but little about it, because I trust we shall, by divine grace, be upheld so as never to know by experience what it is to be overcome of evil! May we be “more than conquerors through Him that loved us”; may we be happily ignorant of what it is to be vanquished by the powers of evil, and remain like the British drummer boy who did not know how to beat a retreat, for he had never had any use for such a thing! May we not know the dishonor and misery of being overcome of evil because divine grace continually gives us the victory! When we *are* overcome of evil, even for a moment, it discovers the sad weakness of our spiritual life. We must still be babes in grace, and sadly carnal if sin is allowed to master us. If we were stronger in the Lord, and in the power of His might, we would overcome the world, itself, by faith! Did not John write unto young men and say, “You are strong and have overcome the wicked one”? If we are overcome of evil, even for a moment, it will cause us great sorrow if we are in our right mind; a tender conscience will be greatly vexed as soon as defeat is sustained, and in looking back upon our fall, if fall we do, it will be a daily grief to us that we allowed ourselves to be overcome by evil at all. To be overcome of evil is dishonoring to our Lord, and opens the mouths of adversaries; those who watch for our falling will be sure to make much of it. “Report it, report it,” they shout, and they *do* report it through the length and breadth of the land—that a servant of Christ has been overcome of evil! And if to be overcome of evil were not occasional, but were continuous; if it could be said of our whole life that we were overcome of evil, it would prove that we were none of Christ's, for he that is born of God overcomes the world. Our Lord Jesus said, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,” and He makes all His *true disciples* partakers of this victory! Only to *conquerors* are the great promises of the Book of Revelation given—“To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna.” “Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the house of My God.” “To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne.” To be defeated in the battle of life would

prove that we did not belong to that conquering seed which, if its heel is bruised, shall nevertheless break the foeman's head! Fix it, then, in your minds that evil is to be overcome! It is a matter of necessity that we wage this war and succeed in it; we must triumph over the powers of darkness!

Few are the words, but weighty is the meaning of our text. In one terse sentence the conflict is set before us, and the sword of the battle is put into our hands: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil *with good*." Good is the *only* weapon which, in this dread conflict, we are permitted to use! And we may rest assured it will be sufficient and effectual, for to use any other weapon is not only unlawful, but altogether impossible, for he who wields the sword of evil is no longer Christ's soldier at all!

The reference in the text is to *personal injuries*, and therefore we shall confine ourselves to that one point, though the principle is capable of very great extension. In fighting with sin and error, our weapons must be holiness and truth, and these alone. It is a wide subject, and I will not venture upon it. That *personal* injury is referred to in my text is clear from the preceding verses, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine: I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head."

With regard to the evil of personal injury, *the common method is to overcome evil with evil*—let us talk about it; secondly, *the divine method is to overcome evil with good*—let us speak of that, and this will, no doubt, exhaust our time. As this is a very practical subject, let us entreat the Holy Spirit to teach us the will of Christ, and then to enable us to obey it in all things. I shall be much disappointed if the subject does not humble as well as instruct us, and if it does this, it will be well for us to fly at once to the blood of the atonement, that we may be purged from former faults, and cleansed for future holiness.

I. THE COMMON METHOD OF OVERCOMING INJURIES IS OVERCOMING EVIL WITH EVIL. "Give him a Roland for his Oliver." "Give him as good as he sends." "Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander." "Be six to his half dozen." I might go on with a score of proverbs, all inculcating the sentiment of revenge, or at least of meeting evil with evil.

I have to observe that the overcoming of evil with evil is, in the first place, *a most natural procedure*; it suggests itself to any fool to overcome evil with evil! A lunatic or idiot could do that! You need not train your children to do it, it will be suggested in their infancy, and they will strike the floor upon which they fall, and beat the post against which they stumble—to punish it for their hurt! It is natural, very sadly natural; a sort of instinct suggests it—the instinct of the worm which turns if it is stepped on. This instinct says, "Surely we are not to allow evil without resenting it, and what can we do better than to treat others as they treat us?" It must be admitted, also, that there is a *show of justice* about such a method of combating evil; why should not a man be made to suffer who makes me suffer? And if he does me wrong, why should I not defend myself, and make him smart for making me smart? I freely admit that this is exceedingly natural and has a show of justice about it. But to which part of us is it natural? Think for a minute; is it natural to the new-created spirit which dwells in believers, or is it natural to us because there is a part of us which is animal? Is it the new man in us which suggests revenge? Or is it the flesh, the mere animal in us which strikes out to avenge itself? A moment's reflection will let you see that the returning of evil for evil is natural to the *animal* nature, but that it is not, and never can be natural to the new-created spirit whose nature is like the God from which it came, namely love, gentleness, and kindness. "Good for evil is God-like. Good for good is man-like. Evil for good is devil-like. "Evil for evil—"; what is it? I quote it to prove my point. It is beast-like! It is like the beast which kicks because it is kicked, gores because it is gored, and bites because it is bitten! Surely we cannot allow the lower part of our triple nature to dictate to our heaven-born spirit. We cannot let the servant be the master! We will be natural, but the nature which we will follow shall be that which we received in our *regeneration* when we were made partakers of the divine nature, and enabled to escape the corruptions of the world. That returning evil for evil looks like rough and ready justice, I have confessed, but then is any man prepared to follow out for himself, and in his own case this rule of justice? Is he prepared to stand before God, and receive evil for his evil? "He shall have justice without mercy that shows no mercy." Is he willing to stand before God on the same terms as he would have the offending one stand before himself? No, our best, and indeed our *only* hope must lie in the mercy of God who freely forgives

offenses! We must look up to infinite love, and entreat the Lord to have mercy upon us according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses, and therefore we must render mercy to others. To recompense evil for evil is natural, but may God deliver us from the nature which makes it natural! It is just, no doubt, after a fashion, but from that sort of justice may our Redeemer rescue us!

Again, it is admitted that the art of returning evil for evil is very, *very easy*. If, my dear friend, you make it a rule that nobody shall ever insult you without having to pay for it, nor treat you with disrespect without meeting his match, you need not pray to God in the morning to help you to carry out your resolve. There will be no need to wrestle in prayer that you may be graciously enabled to take vengeance on your adversaries, and stand up for your rights; you can do that decidedly better by trusting to yourself than by looking to God. Indeed, you dare not look to God about it at all! The devil will help you—and between your own passion, and the evil one, the thing may be very easily managed. There will be no reason for watchfulness; you need not be on your guard, or keep yourself in check; on the contrary, you may give to the very worst part of your nature the greatest possible license, and go ahead according to the rage of your passionate spirit. Prayer and humility of mind will of course be quite out of the question; nor will there be any need for *faith*—you will not commit your case unto God and leave it there—you will fight your own battles, wipe off old scores as you go, and place your dependence on fierce speeches, on mighty fists, or on the law and the policeman! Christian graces will be too much in your way for you to think of them! Gentleness, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness—you will bid good-bye to these, and cultivate the virtues of a savage, or of a bulldog! All this is wonderfully easy; though it may be that before long it will turn out to be difficult!

Now, I put it to Christians whether that which is so very easy to the very worst of men can ever be the right procedure for those who ought to be the best of men? If the divine plan of love is difficult and requires great grace to enable you to follow it, and I freely admit that it does—if it is very difficult to maintain it, and will require much prayer, much watchfulness, and much conquest of yourself—is it not, therefore, the more sure to be right? As for that which is so easy, let that be left to publicans and sinners! But as for you who have received more mercy of God than other men, should you not render more? You believe yourselves to be twice born; you have received a new and heavenly life; what do you do more than others? Ought you to not show that there is more in you than in others by letting more come out of you than comes out of others? Much more is expected of us than of the unregenerate; naturally and rightly, expectation runs high in reference to men who make such high professions, and if the professed Christian is no better in his daily conversation than the ungodly, depend upon it, he is no Christian at all! We possess a higher life, and we are lifted to a nobler platform than the common sons of men, and therefore we must lead a nobler life, and be guided by more sublime principles. Let the children of darkness meet evil with evil, and carry on their wars and fights, their strifes and their envy, their malice and their revenge! But as for you, O believers, you are the children of the God of love, and love must be your life! You have been renewed in the spirit of your minds, and you must not be conformed to this world, but be transformed into the likeness of Christ, your Master. Evil for evil should be a principle *detested* by you, and such should be your loving spirit that it ought to be no longer easy to recompense evil with evil, but difficult, yes, *impossible* to bring you to do anything of the kind! Revenge and fury should be as alien to the spirit of a child of God as they would be to an angel before the throne of God!

By many, to return evil for evil has been judged to be the *more manly course*. Years ago if a gentleman imagined himself to be insulted, it was necessary, according to the code of honor then in vogue, for him either to shed the blood of the offending person, or at least to expose himself to the like peril of his life. Thank God that murderous custom is now almost entirely gone from the face of the earth! The spirit of Christianity has, by degrees, overcome this evil; but there still abides in the world the idea that to stand up for yourself, to just let people know what you are, never to knuckle down to anybody, but to defend your own cause, and vindicate your honor has something extremely manly about it. And to yield, to submit, to be patient, to be meek, to be gentle is considered to be unworthy of a man of spirit. They call it showing the white feather, and being cowardly, though to my mind, he is the bravest man who can bear the most. Now, Christian, who is your model of a man? You do not hesitate for a second, I am sure; there is but one model of a Christian, and that is the man, Christ Jesus. Will you then remember that

whatever is Christly is manly, and whatever you think to be manly which is not Christ-like, is really unmanly, as judged by the highest style of man? The Lord Jesus draws near to a Samaritan village, and they will not receive Him, though He was always kind to Samaritans. Good John, gentle John, becomes highly indignant, and cries, "Lord, will You that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Jesus meekly answers, "You know not what manner of spirit you are of: for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." See Him on another occasion. Your Master has risen from His knees, with the bloody sweat still on His face, and Judas comes and betrays Him; and they begin to handle Him very roughly, and therefore, being highly provoked, brave Peter draws out his sword, and just to flash it a little, he cuts off the ear of Malchus! Hear how gently Jesus says, "Put up again your sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." And so He heals that ear at once! Was that manly, do you think? Was it manly to refuse to call fire from heaven, and to touch and heal the wounded ear? To me it seems superlatively manly! And may such be my manliness and yours! Look at our Lord, again, before the high priest, when an officer of the court, incensed by His gentle answers, smites Him on the cheek. What does Jesus say? Observe the difference between Christ and Paul. Paul says, "God shall smite you, you white wall." Bravo, Paul! That is speaking up for yourself! We cannot blame you, for who are we to censure an apostle? But look at Paul's Master, and hear *His* words, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite Me?" Is not the example of Jesus the more noble, the more God-like? No man, for a moment, can put the two side by side without feeling that the Lord's conduct is by far the more sublime. It is not for us to imitate the *servant* of Christ when Christ, Himself, excels him! Here is victory, when a man so overcomes himself that he replies to evil language with good and wise answers, not with fierce and reviling words! O Christians, look to Christ, your Lord, who all His life endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, but submitted Himself to Him that judges righteously, and who, even on the cruel tree, when He was mocked by those around Him, had nothing to say but this—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." O Man of men, be You the criterion from now on of all the manliness at which we aim! And if others count the opposite to be manly, let them count it as they will—we are not of their mind!

Dear friends, we are now bold to affirm concerning the old, easy, natural method of returning evil for evil, that it does not succeed; nobody ever overcame evil by confronting it with evil. Such a course *increases* the evil! When the great fire was blazing at London Bridge, it would have been a strange way of putting it out or keeping it under if our firemen had lit another fire close to it, or had pumped petroleum upon it! Yet I have known some try to overcome the evil of a passionate temper in a man by becoming passionate themselves—rolling up another tar barrel to his fire, and so making it burn more furiously than ever! That is not conquering evil, nor is evil ever to be so conquered till water drowns the sea! A soft answer turns away wrath, but anger excites more anger and more sin. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles, when it comes to be heaped up with fuel, and blown upon by furious winds!

What is worse, *when we assail evil with evil, we are already overcome*—we have fallen into the very wrong which we complain of. As long as we can be calm and quiet, we are victorious, but our breaking loose into an ill temper is our own defeat—and being overcome, how can we overcome others? Brothers and sisters, the desire to return evil for evil does not succeed because it injures us much more than it injures the person whom we seek to overcome! It has been said that the worst peace is better than the best war, and I believe almost anything is better than becoming angry! Scarcely any injury which we can ever sustain will so injure us as the injury which must arise to us from becoming angry and revengeful! Our enemies are not worth putting ourselves out about, and ten minutes of a palpitating heart, and of a disturbed circulation causes us greater real damage in body than an enemy could inflict in seven years. Ten minutes of a fiery deluge overflowing the whole soul is a serious catastrophe! Ten minutes in which you could not look Jesus in the face; ten minutes in which you would be ashamed to think of the Master's being near; ten minutes of broken fellowship—why this is a very serious self-torture; let us not allow it to please our foes! Alas, I have known professors keep up this wrath for days and weeks; how it must hurt a man to have his soul broiling all that time; to have his heart roasting in the fire of wrath. I feel it to be too painful to bear, even for a brief season. It is bad for us in every sense, it hurts the mind

permanently. Evil for evil is a sharp-edged tool which cuts the man who uses it—a kind of cannon which is most dangerous to those who fire it, both in its discharge, and in its recoil. If you wished to destroy your enemy, it would be wise to make him a present of this dangerous gun, and allow him to have the entire monopoly of it. I may truly say that when we oppose evil with evil, the evil which comes from us does us far more injury than any evil which we experience from others.

Again, the method of overcoming evil with evil does not bear inspection; it does not bear to be pondered and meditated on. Let any renewed man sit down for a minute, after he has fallen into this practice, and ask himself as a Christian, how he feels about it; he has usurped the place of God, for vengeance belongs only to the judge of all the earth—how does he feel while acting as a usurper? Who am I that I should clamber to the throne of God and seize His sword, and attempt to make myself judge and executioner among mankind? Will this bear consideration? Can a child of God thus see himself guilty of high treason against his King? How does a man feel when he is on his knees and remembers what he has done? How does he say, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us”? Do not his eyes fill with tears, and is not his heart heavy with regret? How will your hard speeches and fierce actions appear when viewed from your dying bed? Will railing, fighting and lawsuits be sweet memories there? Can such a thing as repaying evil with evil be the subject of our praise to God? Can we ever thank the God of love for enabling us to avenge ourselves? If we cannot pray about it, or praise about it, let us let it alone! Is there *anything* about it which we could whisper in the ear of Christ? Is there *anything* in it that will help us to closer fellowship with Him? Is there *anything* in anger and wrath which will prepare us for the business of earth, or for the bliss of heaven?

It is bad, bad altogether! The best that I can say of it is that there may be rare occasions in which the provocation may be so great as to present others from condemning us, but then I must add that at such times we had better, even then, make no excuse for ourselves, for the mind of Christ is that when smitten on one cheek, we turn the other, and that in *no case* we render unto any man evil for evil. Beloved brothers and sisters, I beseech you by the mercies of God that you refrain forever from the method of seeking to overcome evil with evil, and that you follow the example of your Lord, taking His yoke upon you and learning of Him, for He is meek and lowly in mind.

II. Let us now consider THE DIVINE METHOD OF OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD. And here I freely admit, to commence with, that this is *a very elevated mode of procedure*. “Overcome evil with good! Ridiculous!” says one. “Utopian,” cries another. “It might do for Plato’s republic,” says a third, “but it will never do for ordinary, everyday life!” Well, I shall not blush to admit that this is a very high course of conduct, and one which the mere worldling cannot be expected to follow—but of Christians we expect higher things! You have a high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and you are therefore called to a high style of character by your glorious Leader, the Lord Jesus Christ! Brethren, if it is difficult, I commend it to you because it is so; what is there which is good which is not also difficult? Soldiers of Christ love those virtues most which cost them most; if it is hard to obtain, the jewel is all the more precious! Since there is sufficient grace to enable us to become like our Lord, we will labor after this virtue, and obtain the great grace which its cultivation requires.

Notice that this text inculcates not merely *passive* non-resistance, though that is going a good way, but it teaches us *active* benevolence to enemies. “Overcome evil with good,” with direct and overt acts of kindness; that is, if any man has done you a wrong, do not only forgive it, but avenge it by doing him a favor! Dr. Cotton Mather was never content till he had bestowed a benefit on every man who had in any way done him an injury. If anybody has slandered you, or treated you unkindly in any way, go out of your way to serve him! “If your enemy is hungry, feed him.” You might say, “Well, I am sorry for him, but really, he is such a vagabond! I could not *think* of helping him.” Yet according to this Scripture, he is the very man you are bound to feed! If he is thirsty, do not say, “I hope somebody will give him a drink; I feel no animosity to the man, but I am not going out of my way to give him a drink.” According to your Lord’s command, he is the man to whom you *must* give drink! Go straightway to the well and fill your pitcher—and hasten to give him a drink at once, and without stint; you have not merely to forgive and forget, but you are bid to inflict upon the malicious mind the blessed sin-killing wound of your hearty and practical goodwill! Give a blessing for a curse, a kiss for a blow, a favor for a wrong. “Oh,”

you say, “this is *high*; I cannot attain unto it.” God is able to give you strength equal to this also. “It is hard,” you say. Ah, but if you take Christ to be your Master, you must do what He tells you, and instead of shrinking because His command seems difficult to flesh and blood, you must cry, “Lord, increase my faith, and give me more of Your Spirit.” To forgive to 70 times seven would not be hard to Christ, for He did it all His life, and it will not be hard for you if the same mind is in you which was also in Christ Jesus. It is to this that you are called! It is a sublime temper, and it is exceedingly difficult, and needs divine grace, needs watchfulness, needs living near to God—but for these reasons it is all the more worthy of a follower of Jesus, and therefore we should aim at it with our whole heart.

The benefit of the method of returning good for evil is that *it preserves the man from evil*. If evil assails you, and you only fight it with good, it cannot hurt you, you are invulnerable; if any man curses you, and you answer him with a blessing, it is clear that the curse has not hurt you, it has not made you full of curses, or else one would come out of you! If a man has slandered you, but you never return him a reproachful word, he has not hurt your real character—the dirt which he has thrown has missed you—for you have none to throw back upon him! If when much provoked your temper still remains calm and quiet, the provocation has not touched you; the arrow has passed harmlessly by! The very thing your enemy wants is to make you descend to his level of anger and malice, but as long as having much provocation you remain unprovoked, you vanquish him! Believe me; you are provoking your adversary terribly if you are quite calm yourself! You are disappointing him; he cannot insert his poisoned darts, for you are clad in armor of proof. He tries to injure you, but he cannot; he fails to make you sin, and so he misses his mark. Do you not see what a wonderful armor it is? If God preserve you so that you have nothing but good wishes and goodwill towards the man who hates you and seeks your ruin, then you are a conqueror indeed!

While this conduct protects you, *it is the very best weapon of offense against the opposer*. William Ladd had a farm in one of the states of America, and his neighbor, Pulsifer, was a great trouble to him, for he kept a breed of gaunt, long-legged sheep, as active as spaniels, which would spring over almost any sort of fence. These sheep were very fond of a fine field of grain belonging to Mr. Ladd, and were in it constantly. Complaints were of no use, for Pulsifer evidently cared nothing for his neighbor’s losses. One morning Ladd said to his men, “Set the dogs on those sheep, and if that won’t keep them out, shoot them.” After he had said that, he thought to himself, “This will not do; I had better try the peace principle.” So he sent for his men, countermanded the order, and rode over to see his neighbor about those troublesome sheep. “Good morning,” he said, but he received no answer. So he tried again, and got nothing but a sort of grunt. “Neighbor,” he said, “I have come to see you about those sheep.” “Yes,” Pulsifer replied, “I know. You are a pretty neighbor to tell your men to kill my sheep! You, a rich man, too, and going to shoot a poor man’s sheep!” Then followed some very strong language, but Ladd replied, “I was wrong, neighbor, and I am sorry for it; think no more about it. But, neighbor, we may as well agree. It seems I have got to keep your sheep, and it won’t do to let them eat all that grain, so I came over to say that I will take them into my homestead pasture, and I will keep them all season; and if any is missing you shall have the pick of mine.” Pulsifer looked ashamed, and then stammered out, “Now, Squire, are you in earnest?” When he found that Ladd really meant to stand to the offer, Pulsifer stood still a moment, and then said, “The sheep shan’t trouble you anymore. When you talk about shooting I can shoot as well as you; but when you speak in that kind and neighborly way, I can be kind too.” The sheep never trespassed into Ladd’s lot again. That is the way to kill a bad spirit! That is overcoming evil with good! If one had begun shooting, and the other had followed suit, they certainly would have been both losers, and both been overcome. But when the offended one made kindness his only return, the battle was over!

I remember, years ago—though I only quote it, not for my own praise, but as an illustration—a certain person; a very good man too, did not admire a course of action that I felt bound to take. He was very angry, and called upon me to express his objections. At last he said, “If you do that I shall expose you in a pamphlet.” I was in a gracious mood at that time, and was not to be ruffled in temper, nor yet turned from my course. I said to him quietly, “What do you think the pamphlet would cost?” “Oh,” he said, “I don’t know, but whatever it costs I shall do it.” I answered, “Well, if you feel you ought to do it, I

should be sorry to see you go into debt, and therefore I will pay the printer's bill. I will trust you to give a truthful account of the matter, and I am not at all ashamed to have my course of action made as public as possible, indeed I had rather it should be." He said he would not like to take any money from me. "Well," I replied, "perhaps you think that there might be some profits upon the sale; you shall be quite welcome to them; your own friends can print for you. I will find the money, and you shall have the profit." I never heard anymore of that pamphlet—and he is an exceedingly good friend of mine at the present moment—and will I hope always remain so.

To remain quiet is generally the way to baffle an adversary; indeed there is no weapon with which he can wound you. If you will not yield so as to give railing for railing, what is to be done with you? It is much the same as when a certain duke proclaimed war against a peaceful neighbor, who was resolved not to fight. The troops came riding to the town, and found the gates open as on ordinary occasions; the children were playing in the streets, and the blacksmith was at his forge; the shopkeepers were at their counters; and so, pulling up their horses, the soldiers inquired, "Where is the enemy?" "We don't know. We are friends." What was to be done under the circumstances but to ride home? So it is in life—if you only meet evil with good, the bad man's occupation is gone!

It has sometimes happened that *evil men have been converted into good men*, and conquered thus in the very best possible way by seeing the patient Christian, by the grace of God, return good for evil. Some years ago a wicked, reprobate sailor was engaged in tarring a vessel, and while he was at his work there came along an old man well known in the district as a Christian. One of the sailor's mates standing by, said to him, "Jack, you cannot provoke *that* man; he is such a gentle-spirited man you cannot put him out of temper." Jack was quite sure he could, and it became the subject of a wager. The wicked fellow took his bucket of tar with which he was tarring the keel, and dared to throw it right over the good old man! It was a most shameful assault, and the fellow deserved the utmost penalty of the law. The old man turned round and calmly said to him, "The Lord Jesus Christ has said that he who offends one of His little ones will find that it were better for him that a millstone had been tied about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea. Now, if I am one of Christ's little ones, it will be very bad for you." Jack slunk back, dreadfully ashamed of himself. What was more, the old man's quiet face haunted him. Night after night he woke up, and in his dreams he saw that old man; and those tremendous words, "that it were better for him that a millstone were about his neck," broke him down before the mercy seat of God. He asked and found pardon; he sought out the old man, confessed his fault, and received forgiveness. Who would not have a bucketful of tar thrown over him if it would *save a soul*? Now, suppose the old man had turned round on him, and uttered some fiery language, or struck at him—who could have blamed him? But then there would have been no triumph of grace in the Christian, and no conversion in the sinner! God has often made use of a gentle, meek, quiet, forbearing spirit to be the power with which He subdues the lion-like rebel, and turns the course of ill-disposed and ungodly men. He makes them see how amazing goodness is, how strong is gentleness, and how omnipotent is love!

Returning good for evil, again *reflects great honor upon Christ*. I do not know of anything which makes the blind world see so much of the glory of Christ as this. When one of the martyrs was being tortured and tormented in a horrible way, the tyrant who had caused his sufferings said to him, "And what has your Christ ever done for you that you should bear this?" He replied, "He has done this for me, that in the midst of all my pain, I do nothing else but pray for you." Ah, Lord Jesus, You have taught us how to conquer, for You have conquered! There are many mighty names on the battle roll of earth, but Your name is not there—there is another conflict, sterner and nobler, and You stand at the head of the heroes who are engaged in it! Read the name, my brethren, it is written in His own blood, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified, the chief of those who overcome evil with good." Who among you will say, "Write down my name, sir, beneath my Lord the Lamb, for in that battle I would have a share, and on those lines I would fight the foe"? Remember *you must* do it or you cannot be like He, and if you are not like He, you have not His Spirit, and "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

I will not explain how this principle can be carried into other things, for there is no time, but I will close by noticing that *everything that is admirable may be said of this method of overcoming evil with good*. It is so noble; it is so becoming one whom God has lifted up to be His child, that I commend it to

every person of sanctified feeling. A Christian is the noblest work of God, and one of the noblest features of a Christian is his readiness to forgive and the cheerfulness with which he seeks to recompense good for evil. The Emperor Adrian, before he reached the throne, had been grievously insulted. When he had attained the imperial purple he met the man who had insulted him. The guilty person was, of course, dreadfully afraid of his mighty foe; he knew that it only needed a wish from the Emperor, and his life would be taken away. Adrian cried out, “Approach. You have nothing to fear. I am an Emperor!” Did this heathen feel that his dignity lifted him above the meanness of revenge? Then, my brethren, let those whom Christ has made kings unto God scorn to render evil for evil! Let us say, “I am a Christian, and my resentments are over; what can I do to *serve you*? I could have fought you to the death before, but now I am dead myself and born-again, and having commenced a new life, behold Christ has made all things new. My animosities are buried in His tomb; my revenges are lost in the abyss into which He has cast my sins; and now, as a new man in Christ Jesus, my life shall be love, for He has said, ‘love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and on the good.’”

Good for evil is nobly congruous with the spirit of the gospel. Were we not saved because the Lord rendered to us good for evil? The spirit of the law is, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” but the spirit of the gospel is, “freely I forgive you: your many iniquities and vast transgressions are all blotted out for Christ’s name’s sake, therefore be pitiful towards others.” Forgiveness is one fruit of the gospel, and doing good in return for evil is another. Should not the spirit of every Christian be one of unconquerable love? For by unconquerable love he is saved! And, beloved, this spirit of forgiveness is the Spirit of God, and he that has it becomes like God. If you would rise to the highest style of being, rise to the condition of a being who can be injured and yet forgive! To be just is something, scarcely for a righteous man would one die, but to be *merciful* and *kind* is much more, since for a good man some would even dare to die—such is the enthusiasm which a loving spirit will kindle! Rise above mere righteousness into the divine atmosphere of love!

And whether men love *you* or not is a small matter; whether you conquer *them* or not is also a little matter, but that you should conquer *evil*, that you should be victorious over *sin*, that you should receive from your Lord at the last, the “Well done, good and faithful servant,” and that you should be like God in your *nature*—these are of the utmost importance to you, for these are heaven! Heaven is to have self dethroned; heaven is to be purged of all anger—to be delivered from all pride. Heaven is, in fact, to be God-like! May we be made so through Jesus Christ our Savior, by the work of His Holy Spirit. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 12.

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